

STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF IOWA  
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

# The Annals of Iowa

---

Volume 49 | Number 6 (Fall 1988)

pps. 544-545

---

## Frontier Times: the 1874-1875 Journals of Sylvester Daniels

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

---

### Recommended Citation

"Frontier Times: the 1874-1875 Journals of Sylvester Daniels." *The Annals of Iowa* 49 (1988), 544-545.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9323>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

His epilogue is also of interest in relating what paths the lives of both the writers of the letters and the recipient, James, took after 1861.

COE COLLEGE

ROSEMARY F. CARROLL

*Frontier Times: The 1874-1875 Journals of Sylvester Daniels*, edited by Tim I. Purdy. Van Nuys, CA: Tim Purdy, 1985. Distributed by Lahontan Images, P. O. Box 1093, Susanville, CA 96130. ii, 186 pp. Maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$12.95 paper.

This volume, privately published by the editor, consists of four journals for the period May 25, 1874, through October 10, 1875, of Sylvester Daniels's sojourn from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to California. His first California destination was Honey Lake Valley, the home of his half-sister Polly Parks, where he arrived on June 4, 1874. Daniels spent the next several months traveling through southern California. The purpose of his journey was to see if the California climate would prove beneficial to his health. Daniels kept the journals as an account for his family back in Iowa.

In the journals Daniels recorded comments on places and people, California family activities, the weather, his work, the terrain, and his health. He was convinced the California climate was better for him and thought his Iowa family should come West. On January 1, 1875, he wrote, "I feel really well now" and "I think this climate would be good for all of us" (79-80). In the epilogue the editor states that Daniels bought property in Surprise Valley, California, in December 1875, and his family arrived from Iowa that same month. Daniels and his wife Mary lived there until their deaths: he, in 1908 and she, in 1892.

The journals of Sylvester Daniels are of some interest as one man's recording of his trip west; however, the volume as a whole has several flaws. Much of the material in the epilogue, such as material on Daniels's early life, would be more helpful in the introduction. The reader is given no reason why Daniels left Michigan for Iowa nor what type of work Daniels did while either in Michigan or Iowa. In addition, the volume contains no notes; people are identified in the text by editorial insertions. In the bibliography, titles of works are not underlined or put in quotation marks; hence, the reader is left to guess if a work is an article or a book. Both the introduction and the epilogue have stylistic problems such as tense shifts and sentence fragments.

Mr. Purdy secured the first two journals from Edith Cetera Barry in 1983; Ms. Barry is not identified. Mr. Purdy states the Barry family was not related to Sylvester Daniels and that he does not know how the Barry family came into possession of the journals: "Somewhere there is

### Book Notices

a tale as to how they obtained the journals" (173). The other two journals Mr. Purdy secured from two great-granddaughters of Sylvester Daniels.

For this volume to be of greater value to individuals interested in the history of the West at the end of the nineteenth century more research on Sylvester Daniels and his family needs to be done. Most important, the volume needs commentary on how typical or atypical Sylvester Daniels was in comparison with others who made the trek west in the 1870s.

COE COLLEGE

ROSEMARY F. CARROLL

*Emily: The Diary of a Hard-Worked Woman*, edited by Janet Lecompte. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987. viii, 166 pp. Notes, index. \$18.95 cloth, \$7.95 paper.

On New Year's Day, 1890, a divorced Colorado woman—and former Iowa resident—began keeping daily accounts of her working and family experiences. For the next year forty-seven-year-old Emily French used her diary to record her feelings about the menial duties she performed as a nurse and domestic servant; her frustrations in trying to support herself, her sister, and two of her children; and her attempts to build a respectable home for herself in the Denver community. Lecompte reproduces French's remarkable diary entries in full, altering them only by adding appropriate punctuation. Lecompte divides the diary into four seasonal sections and includes a brief introduction to each section as well as a general introduction and epilogue to the diary, which provide additional information about French's life and a context for the events that French recorded.

French's diary provides a rare glimpse into the life of a female day laborer in the nineteenth century. Despite her lack of education, the tedious nature of her work, the numerous demands on her time, and her general fatigue, French left behind a vivid account of her life as a single working woman. Lecompte's introductory essays and epilogue add to that portrait and provide a fine methodological model for other historians in her reconstruction of French's life from manuscript census data, local newspaper accounts, and homestead and court records.

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

KATHERINE JELLISON

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.